

Calexico, Calif.,
May 9, 1958

Dear Ernesto,

The only outfit hiring at the Center today was Growers F.L.A. Enclosed is a copy of the contract they were using. The certification number, you will note, is not included. For the other areas you mentioned, I have copied the pertinent information from contracts issued within the past week. On two, the cert. number was included; on one, it was not.

A few other sidelights:

(1) I have repeatedly been told by people who should know that four-week contracts are no longer being employed, for the obvious reason that under them a heavy percentage of the braceros are unable to make enough to pay their debts incurred in the contracting process. The fact is that four-week contracts are still being very much employed, by our good friends the Progressive Growers among others.

(2) In my roamings about the Imperial Valley in the past couple of days, I have seen plenty of evidence that the limitations on employment specified in the contracts are still a mockery -- even after the hullabaloo which attended Keith Mets' testimony before Gathings' subcommittee in March that he was using braceros to drive his tractors. I've seen braceros operating all sorts of farm equipment, driving trucks, etc., and this very morning I saw one of the most interesting spectacles yet. The Salinas Vegetable Growers Exchange camp in Heber is currently closed for repairs which the local compliance officer has been insisting on for a couple of years. It seems the company has brought two braceros down from their operations up North. One was put on as a carpenter, the other as a carpenter's helper, both at 70¢ an hour. I took some pictures of them at work. The compliance man was with me at the time. He took down the facts of the case, and passed them on to Bert Harrigan. Harrigan called the camp manager and told him to pull the bracero-carpenter off what he was doing, and to put him to work as a carpenter's helper along with the other. Later, I asked the compliance man if it might not be a nice idea to pay these fellows what carpenter's helpers generally are paid, and give the bracero-carpenter some back pay representing the differential between 70¢ an hour and carpenter's wages. The compliance man said there was nothing in the world he could do, because the prevailing wage for carpenters and carpenter's helpers wasn't listed with the local Farm Labor Office!

(3) This much must be said for the Imperial Valley Farmers Association, however. They are decent enough to list prohibited employment on their contracts. Few associations do.

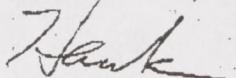
There is absolutely no provision for heating the barracks at the El Centro Reception Center. Nor have I seen any camp in the Imperial Valley where there is such provision. I asked the local compliance man about this. I'll give you his reply verbatim: "There'd be no sense in going to the expense of installing stoves in these places. They'd never be turned on. Or if they were, the men would have to open all the windows to make the place liveable. When you get a barracks with twenty or thirty men in it around here, the heat from their bodies is enough to keep it warm all night, even on the coldest nights of the year."

Here's a heartwarming little vignette that may not have come to your attention before. An employee of the Immigration and Naturalization Service at the Reception Center needed a sewer line dug at his home in Calexico. Being endowed with the qualities which have made America great, he naturally tried to get the job done efficiently and economically and with no perspiration of his own. The long and the short of it is that with the assistance of the head of the Transportation Section at the Center, he tapped a couple of lucky braceros. I rather imagine they were on the INS blacklist for one reason or another, and that this was a quid pro quo arrangement, although I haven't been able to verify this particular detail. In any case, the two men were "held" at the Center for clarification of their records or some such business, and every day for a week driven to our hero's home in Calixto. There they dug his sewer line for him. The job completed, they received contracts and were on their way. Pay? Nothing so crass as pay sullied this relationship.

I got this story from a Public Health Service employee at the Center. He says that if the chips were down, he could round up half a dozen witnesses to the episode. It seems that he has a grudge against the principals involved, who have been engaging in the nefarious pastime of putting the finger on P.H.S. employees involved in the taking of bribes from "specials." Thieves are really falling out at the El Centro Reception Center. If you thought it were worth your while, I think you could probably get an affidavit from this P.H.S. employee concerning the above story, with more names, places, and details than I have been able to garner.

Has the State Department of Employment passed on to you its new policy concerning "gate hiring?" I had a long talk with George Geary and Bob Stevens the day after I saw you in San Jose, and if half of what they said is to be believed, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ a new day for domestic farm workers dawned about three weeks ago.

Best wishes,



Hank Anderson

P.S. The people in the San Jose Farm Placement Office wouldn't let me take a piss in their john after all. Apparently they labor under the impression that farm workers have unusual bladders, as well as unusual backs, minds, and morals, and an undeveloped sense of the respect that one man has a reasonable right to expect from another.